Demobilizing or Activating? The Effect of Anti-Muslim Discrimination on Muslims' Counter-Extremism Engagement

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Abstract

Scholars have reported mixed findings when it comes to the effect of discrimination on political and social behavior. In some cases, experiences of discrimination reduce mainstream political and social engagement, in other cases the opposite seems to be true. The indeterminate outcome of discrimination has important bearing on counter-extremism policies in the West. These policies aim at galvanizing Muslim communities' engagement in countering extremism, but they do so in the context of heightened levels of anti-Muslim discrimination. This article therefore investigates the effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on the willingness of Muslims to take action against Islamist extremism. In two studies, it analyses data from unique large-N nationally representative surveys of British Muslims, using both cross-sectional and experimental designs. Both studies did not find support for the hypothesis that anti-Muslim discrimination reduces the willingness of Muslims to engage in counter-extremism. Furthermore, the investigated relationship appears to be curvilinear, where few experiences with anti-Muslim discrimination increase the likelihood of Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism in comparison to those who did not have such experiences and those who encountered discrimination more frequently. If confirmed by further research, this finding can potentially help to reconcile the mixed results in the literature.

Keywords: anti-Muslim discrimination; counter-extremism; Islamist extremism; British Muslims; survey experiment

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Demobilizing or Activating? The Effect of Anti-Muslim Discrimination on Muslims' Counter-Extremism Engagement

The literature on the effect of discrimination on socio-political behavior reports mixed findings. On one hand, discrimination has been associated with disengagement from mainstream political and social behavior. For example, studies have found correlation between discrimination and political disengagement (Sanders et al. 2014; Schildkraut 2005), anti-social behavior (Kang and Burton 2014; Park et al. 2013), and even terrorism (Piazza 2011; Piazza 2012; Victoroff, Adelman, and Matthews 2012). On the other hand, various studies made a link between discrimination and increased political participation (Page 2018; Ramírez 2007; Sanchez 2006), performance of active citizenship (Peucker 2019), community-focused activism (Mattis et al. 2004; White-Johnson 2012), and stronger adherence to the policies, ideology, and culture of the majority society (Lamont and Mizrachi 2013; Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002).

The indeterminate outcome of discrimination has important bearing on counter-extremism policies adopted by many Western countries in the past few years in response to the threat of Islamist-inspired "home-grown" terrorism. These policies usually include a strong top-down approach but they also express desire to mobilize Muslim communities for a bottom-up engagement, which is seen as particularly effective in preventing terrorism. This "personal" bottom-up engagement is the focus of this paper. It can be very broad, from dissuading extremists in private discussions, reporting suspects to the authorities, and running educational campaigns among Muslim youth to participating in demonstrations against violence and intolerance. However, simultaneously with policies that call for and promote this type of counter-extremism engagement, Muslim minorities in the West are increasingly viewed with anxiety, suspicion, and prejudice, as a result of which anti-Muslim discrimination has been on the rise (Allen 2017; Bozorgmehr and Kasinitz 2018; Kaufman and Niner 2019), and religious

discrimination has become highly salient to Muslims (Martin 2017). In addition, it is often argued that the top-down counter-extremism approach alienates Muslim communities (e.g., Abbas and Awan 2015; Bonino 2013; O'Toole et al. 2016; Saeed and Johnson 2016). The pressing question therefore is, at least from a policy perspective, what is the effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on the willingness of Muslims to engage in countering Islamist extremism?

Thus, the objective of this article is to explore this understudied relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and Muslim engagement in counter-extremism. This is done by a) formulating two opposing hypotheses as to the overall effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on counter-extremism engagement; b) conducting a correlational test (*Study 1*) of these hypotheses using data from the UK Citizenship Survey 2010-11 (n=3491); and c) conducting a survey experiment (*Study 2*) with British Muslims (n=917) in order to verify and further elaborate on the findings of *Study 1*. Situating the studies in the British context is particularly relevant because since the London bombing of 2005, successive governments have encouraged Muslim communities to actively challenge Islamist extremism (Sliwinski 2013; Spalek 2013; Thomas 2017), while at the same time, anti-Muslim discrimination has become a recognized problem affecting British Muslims (Elahi and Khan 2017).

This article advances extant knowledge primarily in two ways. First, its theoretical contribution lies in improving our understanding of the relationship between discrimination and socio-political behavior in general and Muslim counter-extremism engagement in particular. Regarding the former, it suggests that the relationship might be curvilinear, which has a potential to reconcile the two opposing effects found in the literature. As to the latter, the effect of discrimination on Muslim counter-extremism engagement has not been subjected to rigorous testing based on representative samples of the Muslim population. The prevailing assumption in both the policy sector and scholars in the area of (counter)terrorism holds that anti-Muslim

discrimination reduces the willingness of Muslims to cooperate in counter-extremism (Abbas and Awan 2015; Taylor 2018; Thomas 2019). This article finds support for a positive, not negative, relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism.

The second contribution is methodological. The literature on the effect of discrimination on socio-political behavior mostly consists of correlational studies that cannot ascertain the causal relationship between the two. When experimental designs are used, researchers are typically interested in discrimination as an outcome (dependent variable), for example by manipulating participants' social identity in studies using the minimal group paradigm (Moscatelli and Rubini 2013; Rubin, Badea, and Jetten 2014; Tajfel 1970).[1] The present study includes an experimental element where perception of discrimination is manipulated in order to study its impact as an independent variable on intended counter-extremism engagement.

The rest of the article proceeds in the following steps. The next section provides an overview of the existing accounts of the effects of discrimination on socio-political behavior. It suggests that, theoretically, anti-Muslim discrimination can lead to both a reduction and an increase in Muslims' counter-extremism engagement. Two opposite hypotheses are thus formulated. The theoretical section is followed by a section that presents the results of the two studies. *Study 1* draws on the UK Citizenship Survey 2010-11 and tests the two hypotheses by investigating correlations between perceived and experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and actual counter-extremism behavior. *Study 2* provides an experimental test of the effect of perceived discrimination and a second correlational test of the two main hypotheses. This is followed by

[1] The minimal group paradigm stems from the work of Henri Tajfel, who demonstrated that the mere categorization of people into groups, no matter how arbitrary, sets off in-group favoritism and out-group prejudice and discrimination.

a general discussion of the results from both studies. The article concludes by summing up the most important findings, the limitations of the research, and the direction for further studies.

THE EFFECT OF DISCRIMINATION ON SOCIO-POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

Social and cultural context matters for the actions of individuals. It has long been argued that attitudes, values, and opinions prevalent or perceived to be prevalent in society shape individuals' socio-political behavior (Books and Prysby 1988; Verba and Almond 1963). A number of studies from various academic disciplines investigated the effect of discrimination as one such contextual factor. Discrimination can be defined as "the effective injurious treatment of persons on grounds rationally irrelevant to the situation" (Antonovsky 1960:81). It is usually studied as individually *experienced* discrimination or as *perceived* discrimination (i.e. the level of discrimination to which an individual believes his or her group is subjected).

In the last two decades, the scholarship on anti-Muslim prejudice, hate and discrimination made significant theoretical and empirical contribution in response to the post-9/11 political and social environment. An important stream of this literature investigates the targeting of Muslims as a result of the *racializing of religion*, which is "a process by which a group of religious people become associated with phenotypical and cultural characteristics that are deemed unchanging and hereditary" (Kaufman and Niner 2019:6). Hence, despite their cultural and phenotypical diversity, Muslims are assigned a particular Muslim identity made of a "visible Muslim archetype" and a set of cultural, behavioral and attitudinal characteristics, which are deemed "inheritable" and inferior to the white Christian or Western population (Considine 2017; Meer and Modood 2010; Selod and Embrick 2013). The media play a key role in the creation of this essentialized Muslim (racial) category as their reports are dominated by a particular - Middle-Eastern – representation of Muslims and negative stories, which create and cement the notion of Muslims as Others in relation to the West (Considine 2017; Saeed 2007).

Therefore, the conflation between race, ethnicity and religion that leads to anti-Muslim discrimination makes it difficult to categorize instances of discrimination as clearly racial, ethnic, or religious. Nevertheless, analytically, it still makes sense to ask Muslims about their perceived reason for their discrimination, because perceived *religious* discrimination can have effect on their attitude and behavior concerning countering *religious* extremism.

Hypotheses

There is a rich literature on the effect of discrimination on mental health, identity and socio-political engagement (e.g., voting and volunteering). While there are no studies of counter-extremism engagement as an outcome of discrimination, the existing literature suggests both demobilizing and mobilizing effect on Muslims' willingness to take action against Islamist extremism.

The common starting point of psychological studies on discrimination is that both experienced and perceived discrimination are fundamentally negative to one's mental health (Soto, Dawson-Andoh, and BeLue 2011). There is substantial evidence that discrimination-related stress can result in mental health problems such as anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, or depression (Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000; Major, Quinton, and McCoy 2002) and a host of negative emotions like anger or frustration (Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000; Swim et al. 2003). A number of studies suggests that one way of coping with discrimination leads though an increased identification with one's minority group. The rejection-identification model posits that perceived social rejection and devaluation from the majority relates positively to strength of minority identification (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999). The rejection-disidentification model developed by Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, and Solheim (2009) further proposes that perceived discrimination not only increases minority group identification but also decreases identification with and increases negative attitudes toward the majority. Indeed, some

studies showed that discrimination is a powerful negative factor in the adaptation of immigrants to their host societies (Noh et al. 1999; Schmitt et al. 2014). Moreover, extending Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) theory of reactive ethnicity to religion, scholars demonstrated that Muslim immigrants tend to reaffirm their religious identity when faced with discrimination (Fleischmann et al. 2011; Ghaffari and Çiftçi 2010; Nagra 2011). Importantly, such *reactive identity formation* (Nagra 2011) can transform into sub-cultural oppositional identity, which is antagonistic toward the majority (Çelik 2015).

Therefore, it is not surprising that a number of studies in political science, sociology and criminology link discrimination to political and social withdrawal, alienation, and even crime and violence. In her study of the Latino minority in the United States, Schildkraut (2005) concludes that discrimination leads to attitudinal and behavioral alienation with respect to political engagement (voting and trust). Oskooii (2016) found that perceived societal discrimination is associated with the political withdrawal of Muslim Americans (voting registration and turnout). In a recent study of the effects of media representation on Muslims, Saleem and Ramasubramanian (2017) found that negative portrayal predicts lower desire to be accepted by the majority and more likely avoidance of interaction with the majority by Muslim American students. Likewise, studies of Muslim minorities in Norway (Kunst et al. 2016) and Spain (Chryssochoou and Lyons 2010) concluded that discrimination negatively predicts socializing with members of the majority and political participation, respectively.

Another study of East and South Asian American students linked perceived discrimination to anti-social behavior (Park et al. 2013), while outcomes in the form of delinquency (Kang and Burton 2014) and inter-personal violence (Estrada-Martínez et al. 2012) have been reported elsewhere. One study of Somali Canadians concluded that out-group discrimination reduced the interest of young men to promote anti-violence behaviors (Ungar et al. 2018). In her discussion of the impact of Islamophobia, Sadek (2017) suggested that the stigmatization of

Muslims lead to shame, driving some Muslims to adopt a fundamentalist outlook. She also pointed out that Muslims' reactions to Islamophobia-induced shame prevent the development of healthy self-criticism. Finally, a number of radicalization models propose that anti-Muslim discrimination is one factor involved in the process of radicalization (King and Taylor 2011). This assertion finds support in the existing quantitative studies that link discrimination to the support or incidents of terrorism (Piazza 2011; Piazza 2012; Victoroff et al. 2012).

The studies reviewed above all point to effects of discrimination that are not conducive to counter-extremism activism. If counter-extremism is understood as acts of positive political engagement (in the normative sense) and a helping social behavior involving an element of self-criticism vis-à-vis the majority, then it is likely that experienced or perceived discrimination reduces the willingness of Muslims to engage. The first hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H1: The more British Muslims experience or perceive anti-Muslim discrimination, the less likely they are to engage in countering Islamist extremism.

However, as briefly indicated in the introduction, a number of studies arrived at conclusions contrary to the logic underpinning Hypothesis 1. At the extreme end of this literature, some members of the discriminated minority might engage in counter-stereotypic behavior to demonstrate that they are different from the stigmatized group, or they cope with discrimination by strongly adhering to state ideologies or policies as a way to express their belonging to the majority (Lamont and Mizrachi 2013; Steele et al. 2002). While it is difficult for Muslims to disengage from their stigmatized identity due to the "bright boundary" between them and the majority society, even "total ethnic or Muslim identification does not necessarily imply that

people would not be interested in developing a sense of commitment to the nation" (Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007:1460).

In fact, enhanced minority group identification theorized by the rejection-identification model can lead Muslims to increased engagement in countering Islamist extremism, if we understand such engagement as a pro-social activity aimed at benefiting one's in-group (Keles, Sezgin, and Yilmaz 2019). Sánchez-Jankowski (2002) argues that members of excluded minority groups have positive attitudes towards activities that directly benefit their own community. For example, the correlation between discrimination and pro-social community-focused activism has been shown in studies of African Americans (Mattis et al. 2004; Szymanski 2012; White-Johnson 2012). Similarly, experience with sexism has been linked to feminist activism (Friedman and Leaper 2010; Liss, Crawford, and Popp 2004; Stake 2007). Many British Muslim counter-extremism activists that I spoke with in the past (Shanaah, 2019a) have expressed the notion that Muslim communities are negatively affected by both anti-Muslim discrimination and Islamist extremism. The two phenomena were often viewed as mutually constituting and reinforcing. Tackling both discrimination and Islamist extremism was then viewed as the best way to protect Muslim communities and especially Muslim youth.

Another argument for why discrimination might enhance Muslims' counter-extremism engagement is based on the theories of social movement and collective action. Discrimination is a cause of grievance, and according to these theories, grievance is a precondition to socio-political engagement aimed at redressing whatever injustice gave rise to the grievance (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013; Wright and Lubensky 2009). A number of studies have shown that discrimination by political institutions leads to increased political participation (Barreto and Woods 2005; Oskooii 2016; Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Ramírez 2007). In line with these studies, we observe Muslim minority members protesting and otherwise politically engaging to redress discrimination by the non-Muslim majority (Amiraux 2005;

Hatuqa 2018; Lindekilde 2008; McGinty 2012). There are at least two reasons why such activism against discrimination can include engagement in countering Islamist extremism as well. Muslims who become active in a protest or a campaign against prejudice of or unfair treatment by the majority would likely be ready to take similar actions against prejudice or injustice espoused by Islamist extremists out of principal or at least to maintain the semblance of consistency. Obviously, there would always be those who condemn one but justify the other. However, many surveys show that Muslims consistently condemn and oppose both (e.g., Frampton, Goodhart, and Mahmood 2016; Ipsos MORI 2018). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: The more British Muslims experience or perceive anti-Muslim discrimination, the more they are likely to engage in countering Islamist extremism.

STUDY 1: THE UK CITIZENSHIP SURVEY 2010-11

This study makes use of a unique survey conducted in the UK that included an unusually large, nationally representative sample of Muslims and questions pertaining to both experienced/perceived discrimination and actual counter-extremism engagement. This allows for a statistical test of the relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and Muslim counter-extremism engagement.

Data

The UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011 was commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government and was conducted through face-to-face interviews by the companies Ipsos MORI and TNS-BMRB in England and Wales in the period from April 2010 to March 2011. The survey included a nationally representative Muslim sample (n=3491; 51% men and

49% women ranging from 16 to 90 year old with the mean of 37), which is used for the analysis in the present study. The methodological details of the survey can be found online (Department for Communities and Local Government 2011).

Measures

Past counter-extremism behavior. The main dependent variable was measured as a simple formative index created by adding up yes/no responses to the following question: "In the last five years, have you done any of the things on this card in order to reduce or lower support for violent extremism in the name of religion?" The options on the card that were used to construct the index were the following:

- "Disagreed with violent extremist beliefs in conversations I've had with people I know."
- "Spoken out publicly against people who encourage others to support violent extremism."
- "Signed a petition against violent extremism."
- "Joined a campaign against violent extremism."
- "Attended a public meeting to talk about how the community can protect itself against violent extremism."

The index was scored 0 to 5, where 0 means no counter-extremism behavior, and 5 means taking all five types of counter-extremism action. It had a mean of .4 (SD=.73). Refusals and "don't know" answers were coded as missing, also in all other variables used in this study.

Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination. This measure was constructed as a categorical variable by adding up yes/no responses to the following questions:

1) "In the last five years, do you think you have been discriminated against when you have been refused or turned down for a job?"

2) "Thinking about anything that has happened in this local area, have you personally experienced harassment because of your skin color, ethnic origin, or religion in the last two years in any of the ways listed on the card?"
3) "In the last five years**,** do you think you have been discriminated against at work with regard to promotion or a move to a better position?"
4) "Please could you look at this card and tell me if you think that any of the organizations on the card have ever discriminated against you because of your religion?"[2]

Only those who replied affirmatively to one of the four questions and indicated that the reason for their discrimination was their religion[3] were counted as having experienced anti-Muslim discrimination. The variable had five categories corresponding to a number of experiences of anti-Muslim discrimination mentioned by respondents: no experience (n = 3,019), one mention (n = 329), two mentions (n = 75), three mentions (n = 16), and four mentions (n = 5).

Perceived anti-Muslim prejudice. Although there was no measure of perceived anti-Muslim discrimination, the survey contained a question about perceived religious prejudice, which is conceptually distinct yet a helpful approximation of perceived discrimination. First, the respondents were asked whether they thought there was more, less or about the same amount of religious prejudice in Britain than there was five years ago. Out of 1,299 Muslim respondents who thought there was more religious prejudice (in general), 1,201 thought it

[2] The card listed the following organizations: A local doctor's surgery, a local school, a council housing department or housing association, a local council (apart from the housing department), a private landlord or letting agent, the courts (Magistrates Courts and Crown Court), the Crown Prosecution Service, the police, the Prison Service, and the Probation Service.

[3] Affirmative replies to questions 1 to 3 were followed up by options from which the respondent could choose the reason for his or her experienced discrimination. One of the options was "my religion."

concerned prejudice against Muslims rather than other groups. Out of 288 Muslim respondents who thought there was less prejudice, 165 thought it was less with respect to Muslims. Other Muslim respondents either thought there was about the same amount of religious prejudice in Britain (n=1,381) or did not know (523). However, it does not follow from the data what those respondents who thought there was more/less religious prejudice against *other* groups thought about the level of prejudice against Muslims. It is also not clear what share of those who thought the level of prejudice was the same had Muslims as a group in their mind as a basis for their answer. For this reason, I constructed this variable as a binary, where those who explicitly identified Muslims as more prejudiced against were assigned the value 1 (n=1,201) and everybody else was assigned the value 0 (n=2,290).

Results

The results are displayed in Table 1, which is a multiple regression table. It shows that experienced anti-Muslim discrimination is positively related to taking counter-extremism action and statistically significant ($p<.001$). British Muslims who mentioned that they were discriminated based on their religion, regardless of how many times, were more likely to have engaged in counter-extremism than those who did not mention any such experience. The relationship between perceived anti-Muslim prejudice and counter-extremism engagement is also positive and statistically significant ($p<.001$).

The effects of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and perceived anti-Muslim prejudice are controlled for standard demographic variables (sex, age, education). Two other controls included the feeling of belonging to the UK and the importance of religion to one's identity. The former was included because strong social identity (in this case, being part of the British society) was identified as a good predictor of collective action aimed at protecting or expressing such identity (Klandermans 2014). The inclusion of the latter, which was the closest

approximation to the strength of Muslim identity, reflected the important role of identity in the research on socio-political engagement of minorities reviewed above.

According to Table 1, Muslim men are significantly more likely to engage in counter-extremism than women, as are those Muslims who have higher rather than lower education, strong rather than weak feelings of belonging to the UK and who were born in the UK (29% of the sample) rather than outside of it. Those who indicated that religion was very important to their identity (77%) were negatively associated with past counter-extremism behavior, although the relationship was statistically significant only at 90% confidence level (p=.052).

The positive and significant correlation between anti-Muslim discrimination and past counter-extremism behavior remains the same if both variables are changed into dichotomous measures (see online supplement A1).

Table 1 about here

There are some limitations, in the light of which these results should be viewed. First, the dependent variable is based on a survey question that asks the respondents to report counter-extremism behavior for five years in the past. Besides recall and social desirability problems, there is an issue caused by the fact that the measure of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination is composed of questions probing different time periods (e.g., the question about harassment asks for two years in the past). As a result, there could be a time mismatch where some respondents could have engaged in counter-extremism first and only later experienced some aspects of anti-Muslim discrimination.

The second limitation pertains to the wording of the question used to measure the outcome variable. Participants were asked about their past actions to reduce or lower support for violent extremism in the name of religion, but it was not specified to them what religion is of interest here. Later in the survey, the respondents were asked if they have personally seen any materials

that tried to encourage people to support violent extremism in the name of religion. Out of 227 respondents who replied affirmatively, only 131 named Islam. Other religions were mentioned too, among them Christianity (n=47), Judaism (n=19), and Hinduism (n=11). Therefore, some respondents might have had the far right ("Christian religion") or other non-Islamist extremists in mind when they replied to the question about their past counter-extremism behavior.

Despite these limitations, the results are in support of *H2* and call for exploring the positive effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on Muslims' counter-extremism engagement in more detail as well as experimentally.

STUDY 2: SURVEY EXPERIMENT

This study provides an experimental test of the relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and counter-extremism behavioral intentions of British Muslims. Unlike in *Study 1* where the dependent variable was actual past behavior, *Study 2* investigates intended behavior, and it employs an experimental design that prioritizes internal validity over external validity.

Participants and Procedure

The second study draws on data from an online survey experiment with self-identified Muslims living in the UK. The data was collected between October 19, 2018 and November 5, 2018 by the survey company Qualtrics. Participants were financially rewarded according to Qualtrics' reward scheme. The final sample consists of 917 participants (457 women and 460 men) aged between 18 and 76 (mean=33), which makes it nationally representative on these two criteria (although the sample is slightly younger than the population). About 74 percent of the participants were born in the UK and 91 percent were British citizens (full sample characteristics are provided in online supplement A2).

The procedure of the experimental part of the survey was as follows. After replying to questions measuring demographic and other control variables, the participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the treatment condition, the participants replied to items measuring experienced and perceived anti-Muslim discrimination, which also served the purpose of making the issue of discrimination salient. Then, participants read three pieces of statistics (each on a separate screen, one after another) about high levels of anti-Muslim discrimination (regarding physical abuse, job discrimination, and online hostility), and they were asked to indicate on each whether they were familiar with the statistics or not. Subsequently, the participants saw an anti-Muslim image with the information that it was shared by a leading Vote Leave referendum campaign board member, and they were asked to write how they felt about it.

The purpose of making the participants reflect on these statistics and the image in the treatment condition was to prime them with high perception of anti-Muslim discrimination. After the treatment, the participants read a short hypothetical scenario about a Muslim speaker scheduled to hold a public lecture in their neighborhood on topics such as the duty of Muslims to reject democracy and to punish homosexuals. Then, the participants were asked to indicate the likelihood of taking five different counter-extremism actions in response to the scheduled lecture. Next, a development of the scenario was presented to the participants in which, shortly after the lecture, a person from the neighborhood who had attended the lecture had become "very vocal about the need to physically attack homosexuals, encouraging other Muslims to do so." Again, the participants were asked to indicate the likelihood of taking five different counter-extremism actions in response to this person (full details about the treatment and the two hypothetical scenarios are included in the online supplement A3).

In the control condition, the participants were not exposed to the anti-Muslim statistics and the image. They went straight from items on demographics and other control variables to

answering the questions about the two scenarios. Then, they proceeded to items measuring experienced and perceived anti-Muslim discrimination. All participants were debriefed about the general purpose of the survey and the existence and nature of the manipulation.

Measures

Counter-extremism intentions 1. As described above, the scenario presented to the participants consisted of two stages: a low-threat stage (a public lecture containing extremist ideas) and a high-threat stage (an individual likely to commit religiously inspired violence). Both stages were associated with a different set of possible counter-extremism actions. Therefore, willingness to engage in counter-extremism was measured using two separate dependent variables. Counter-extremism intentions 1 is an index that was constructed using replies about the likelihood of engaging in the five different types of actions ($\alpha = .85$) in the run-up to the hypothetical public lecture held by a Muslim extremist (stage 1). The responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale and then transformed into a scale from 0 ("extremely unlikely") to 1 ("extremely likely"). The five actions were signing a petition against the event (mean=.63, SD=.33), attending a public demonstration against the event (mean=.44, SD=.32), opposing the speaker on social media (mean=.48, SD=.32), opposing the speaker in a face-to-face discussion (mean=.45, SD=.31), and physically obstructing the event (mean=.38, SD=.31). The index was constructed by adding up the responses and calculating their mean value for each respondent. It has a scale of 0 to 1 with the mean of .48 (SD=.25).

Counter-extremism intentions 2. This measure is an index constructed by adding up responses on a 7-point Likert scale regarding the likelihood of taking five different actions ($\alpha = .81$) in response to the second part of the hypothetical scenario where a radicalized Muslim is now urging others to physically attack homosexuals (stage 2). The measure was calculated in the same way as the first outcome variable, and it falls in the range between 0 and 1 with a

mean of .59 (SD=.23). The five actions making up the index were reporting the individual to the authorities (e.g., the police) (mean=.66, SD=.29), contacting family or friends of the individual (mean=.61, SD=.30), personally confronting the individual's views in a face-to-face discussion (mean=.52, SD=.31), notifying a local Muslim community leader (e.g., an imam) (mean=.63, SD=.30), and contacting an NGO that deals with extremism or similar issues (mean=.52, SD=.33).

Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination. This measure was constructed as a categorical variable using the following adapted question from the Experience of Discrimination (EOD) scale (Krieger et al. 2005): "Have you personally ever experienced discrimination, been prevented from doing something, or been hassled because of your skin color, ethnic origin, or religion?" The participants could then choose from four options: "never", "once", "two or three times", and "four or more times". If they indicated that they experienced discrimination, the participants were further asked to choose whether the reason was their skin color, ethnicity, or religion, with an option to indicate multiple reasons. The variable consists of four categories corresponding to the frequency of discrimination based on religion: never (n = 436), once (n = 149), two or three times (n = 154), and four or more times (n = 178).

Perceived anti-Muslim discrimination. This variable was measured with a simple additive index constructed from six adapted items ($\alpha = .75$) from the perceived discrimination section of the Scale of Ethnic Experience (Malcarne et al. 2006). These items were: "Generally speaking, Muslims are respected in the UK" (after reversing: mean=.47, SD=.28), "Muslims have been treated well in British society" (after reversing: mean=.47, SD=.28), "Muslims in the UK do not have the same opportunities as other people" (mean=.53, SD=.29), "Discrimination against Muslims is not a problem in the UK" (after reversing: mean=.62, SD=.29), "Muslims are often criticized in this country" (mean=.65, SD=.27), and "In the UK, the opinions of Muslims are treated as less important than those of other people" (mean=.56,

SD=.27). The index was constructed by adding the values of all six questions (measured on a 5-point Likert scale) and calculating the mean for each participant. The index is scored 0 to 1 with a mean of .55 (SD=.18).

Results

The results of the experimental component of the survey is displayed in Table 2. The exposure to discrimination prime had a small (b=-.014 and -.018 respectively for the two scenarios) and negative effect on the likelihood of intended counter-extremism behavior in both the low and high threat parts of the scenario. The effects were, however, not statistically significant.

Table 2 about here

A correlational analysis of the relationship between self-reported anti-Muslim discrimination and counter-extremism engagement is displayed in Table 3. The table is a multiple regression analysis estimating the direct effect of experienced and perceived anti-Muslim discrimination on intended counter-extremism behavior at both stages of the scenario across the entire sample. In the treatment condition, both types of discrimination were measured before the manipulation, and thus, they are not affected by it. A closer examination of the data confirms that there is no systematic difference in the level of self-reported anti-Muslim discrimination across the two conditions.

Table 3 shows that experiencing anti-Muslim discrimination "two or three times" is associated with higher likelihood of counter-extremism engagement in both stages of the scenario than never experiencing such discrimination. However, experiencing anti-Muslim discrimination "once" or "four or more times" does not have an effect on intended counter-extremism behavior over not experiencing anti-Muslim discrimination at all. If we collapse experienced anti-Muslim discrimination in a dichotomous variable (never x once or more), we find a positive

effect of experiencing discrimination on counter-extremism engagement over never experiencing discrimination in both stages of the scenario. This effect is, however, not statistically significant.

Perceived anti-Muslim discrimination correlates negatively with counter-extremism engagement in the first stage of the scenario and positively in the second, but it does not reach statistical significance in either.

The table also includes controls similar to *Study 1*: demographic variables, whether the respondent was born in the UK and strength of Muslim identity.[4] As in *Study 1*, Muslim women appear to be significantly less likely to engage in counter-extremism than men. They also reported significantly more experiences with anti-Muslim discrimination (but not in *Study 1* were men reported more experiences with religious discrimination). Higher levels of education are positively correlated with counter-extremism engagement, but this relationship does not reach statistical significance in either stage of the scenario. Age and being born in or outside of the UK do not seem to predict counter-extremism intentions either. Strong Muslim identity is positively correlated with counter-extremism engagement, but this relationship is statistically significant only in the second stage of the scenario.

Table 3 about here

Table 3 suggests that the relationship between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and the willingness to engage in counter-extremism can be non-linear in the sense that British Muslims

[4] Muslim identity was constructed as a simple formative index ($\alpha = .96$) based on four items on a 7-point Likert scale: "I feel a strong attachment to Muslims", "Being a Muslim is a very important part of how I see myself", "My Muslim identity is an important part of my self-image", and "I identify strongly with Muslims." The index was scored 0 to 1 with a mean score of .82 (SD= .25).

who experience "medium" levels of discrimination are more likely to engage in counter-extremism than those who have never experienced discrimination or, on the contrary, experienced a lot of it. Such a relationship, translated into a graphical representation, would have the shape of an inverted letter U.

However, if different frequencies of experienced discrimination result in different levels of counter-extremism engagement, it is possible that the manipulation "flattened" the overall effect by activating and de-mobilizing different categories of Muslims than in the control condition. Although the prime was intended to increase *perceived* discrimination, the immediate shock of confronting it could have effects similar to *experienced* discrimination. The treatment could have activated Muslims who had never experienced discrimination and de-mobilized those who had experienced it. Therefore, Table 4 displays a similar analysis as in Table 3 but reduces the sample to the control condition.

Table 4 about here

The results presented in Table 4 show that, in the control condition, experiencing anti-Muslim discrimination "once" and "two or three times" is positively and significantly related to counter-extremism engagement in both stages of the scenario when compared to never experiencing anti-Muslim discrimination or experiencing it "four or more times." Figure 1 illustrates the non-linear nature of the relationship between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and counter-extremism engagement.

Figure 1 about here

DISCUSSION

The results of *Study 1* support the expectation formulated in *H2* that there is a positive relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and Muslim counter-extremism engagement.

However, this hypothesis finds only partial support in *Study 2*. Here, only certain levels of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination positively correlate with counter-extremism engagement, while perceived anti-Muslim discrimination does not. Moreover, the experimental component of *Study 2* also did not show an effect of primed perceived anti-Muslim discrimination on counter-extremism engagement.

There are several reasons why more weight should be given to the results of *Study 2*, beyond the limitations of the question formulations in the *UK Citizenship Survey* noted earlier. When it comes to the measure of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination, the *UK Citizenship Survey* collected data concerning only a limited range of time periods (2 or 5 years in the past) and potential experiences, namely in one's local area, at work, and by some state institutions. This leaves out other experiences (e.g., inter-personal discrimination outside of one's local area) as well as discrimination experienced beyond the time limits set by relevant survey questions. It is also the likely cause of the discrepancy between the levels of anti-Muslim discrimination reported in *Study 1* (12%) and *Study 2* (37%).[5] Furthermore, the *UK Citizenship Survey* did not collect data on the frequency of discriminatory experiences, so adding together the number of experiences from different areas (e.g., local area, work, and state institutions) does not accurately reflect the total frequency of personal encounters with anti-Muslim discrimination. Hence, the curvilinear relationship noted in *Study 2* could have been obscured in *Study 1*.

Concerning perceived anti-Muslim discrimination, the limitation of *Study 1* is that it used only a proxy in the form of perceived prejudice, which is a related but not equivalent concept. In contrast, *Study 2* measured perceived anti-Muslim discrimination with the help of a validated scale containing multiple items. Another factor why the two studies differ on whether perceived

[5] Some of the discrepancy might have been also caused by a younger sample in *Study 2*, as younger immigrants tend to report higher levels of discrimination than older ones (Straiton et al. 2019).

anti-Muslim discrimination correlates with Muslim counter-extremism engagement might lie in the well-documented tendency of minorities to downplay personal experiences with discrimination and inflate perceived discrimination of their group (e.g., Hodson and Esses 2002; Taylor et al. 1990). This phenomenon could have been more pronounced in *Study 1* where data was collected in face-to-face interviews and less of a problem in *Study 2* where respondents enjoyed the anonymity of an online survey. Thus, the positive correlation found in *Study 1* could reflect the effect of experienced rather than perceived discrimination. That the experimental component of *Study 2* did not show any effect of perceived anti-Muslim discrimination as well indicates that it might simply play less of a role in determining Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism than experienced discrimination.

The curvilinear relationship between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and Muslim counter-extremism engagement suggested by *Study 2* is an important finding. It indicates that Muslims who experience anti-Muslim discrimination a few times are more likely to engage in counter-extremism than those who have never experienced it, but only up to a certain point. At high frequency levels of anti-Muslim discrimination, the willingness to engage in counter-extremism drops. This is reminiscent of the curvilinear relationship found between the level of activism and the degree of openness of the political opportunity structure in a given context (Eisinger 1973; Koopmans and Rucht 1995), particularly Tilly's (1978) application to the relationship between mobilization and regime repression. The argument goes that we see less mobilization in the situation of no repression (co-optation) and hard repression (intimidation) than in the situation of moderate repression. Santoro and Azab (2015, 2017) broadened the conceptualization of repression to everyday harassment by members of the majority and showed that fear of repression felt by Arab Americans had a similar curvilinear effect on their protest mobilization. A similar effect was shown in a recent study of sexual minority members'

political participation in the context of high and low levels of political discrimination (Page 2018).

Hence, if we think of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination as a type of repressive contextual structure, we could make sense of the fact that "moderate" levels of discrimination mobilize some Muslims to become politically and socially active towards, or at least mentally ready to champion, the cause of justice, equality, and citizenship rights. Mobilization for these positive ideals likely entails preparedness to engage against any source of their possible violation, including Islamist extremism.

With no experience of discrimination, many Muslims might not feel the need to take it upon themselves to become active. However, if experiences of repression (discrimination) become too frequent, we also see less engagement relative to the "moderate" levels of discrimination. The mechanisms behind this reduction in counter-extremism engagement can be as complex as the literature on the effects of discrimination reviewed above. Some Muslims might develop mental health problems and withdraw from public life. Others can reduce their identification with the majority and focus on activities benefiting Muslim communities (the in-group), while relegating the problem of Islamist extremism and its solution to the non-Muslim part of the society or authorities. Their withdrawal of help in counter-extremism can be read as a political statement critical of the level of repression or unjust discrimination faced by Muslim communities. Some Muslims might even develop oppositional identities and come to regard extremism as a form of counter-culture and revolt against both "moderate" Muslims and non-Muslims.

CONCLUSION

The studies presented in this article tested the relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and the willingness of Muslims to counter Islamist extremism. Two important findings should

be highlighted. First, both studies did not find support for the hypothesis that anti-Muslim discrimination reduces the willingness of Muslims to engage in counter-extremism. Although such an assumption might be intuitive, and it is prevalent on the policy level as well as in the literature on the effect of counter-terrorism policies in Muslim communities (Shanaah, 2019b), this article shows that it needs to be reassessed.

Second, the relationship between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and Muslim counter-extremism engagement appears to be curvilinear. According to the results, a few experiences with anti-Muslim discrimination increases the likelihood of Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism in comparison to those who did not have such experiences and those who encountered discrimination more frequently. If the curvilinear relationship found here holds up, it means that discrimination has both negative and positive effects on socio-political behavior in general, depending on how often one experiences it. In this way, the two streams of extant literature, the one arguing for negative effects (political and social disengagement, anti-social behavior, and possibly, violence) and the other arguing positive effects (increased political participation, active citizenship, pro-social behavior), can be reconciled. The mixed findings in the literature may reflect that studies have investigated the relationship in different contexts where the average level of experienced discrimination is situated at different points along the curve. Different contexts can also make the effect of frequently experienced discrimination more or less pronounced, giving an impression of a positive or negative linear relationship. For example, the willingness to engage against violent extremism might not be reduced by frequent experiences of discrimination as much as in the case of voting or contacting politicians, because extremism carries stronger moral and ethical dimension. Finally, divergent results can be caused by different measures of discrimination, often limited by specific areas (e.g., at the airport or in the workplace) or time periods (e.g., in the past two years).

Some limitations of these findings were already discussed in the previous section. In addition, as with other survey-based research, another limitation is the potential for social desirability bias, especially when it comes to sensitive questions of counter-extremism engagement. For example, some respondents might have felt that they needed to report engagement in order to present themselves or Muslim communities in a better light. However, the data shows variance within the two stages of the scenarios as well as between them, suggesting that this bias is not strong. Another limitation is the focus of this article on the single case of British Muslims, lowering the external validity of the study.

Future studies should validate these findings, especially regarding the curvilinear relationship between experienced discrimination and Muslims' willingness to take action against Islamist extremism. If confirmed, it would be valuable to learn more about the mechanisms through which different levels of discrimination translate into different levels of counter-extremism engagement. Developing a more complex and nuanced theoretical model of different effects of discrimination on Muslim minorities' activism regarding extremism and counter-extremism would benefit scholars in a number of disciplines and sub-fields outside terrorism and security studies, because it would likely include general mechanisms applicable to various types of socio-political engagement of minorities. This model would ideally include several moderating and mediating factors including psychological dispositions and attitudes, identity, and socio-economic characteristics.

This article also carries some implications to policy-makers and the wider society. The levels of experienced religious discrimination reported here, especially in *Study 2*, should serve as a reminder that anti-Muslim discrimination is a significant social problem. That "moderate" levels of discrimination seem to stimulate Muslims' counter-extremism engagement should be perceived as a testimony to Muslims' moral activism and orientation rather than a reason for not doing anything about discrimination. Active citizenship and co-production of government

policies can and should be stimulated in other, more benign, ways. This is not to validate the idea that Muslims have a special responsibility for countering Islamist extremism or that they are better positioned to do so than the rest of the society and its institutions. Indeed, responsibilizing Muslims for counter-extremism can be counter-productive (Shanaah, 2019b). Preventing violent extremism is a task for the entire society and forging inclusive society whose members are socially and politically active - not because they are propelled by repression or discrimination but because they are positively motivated - has an intrinsic value.

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TABLES

Table 1.

Direct effects of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and anti-Muslim prejudice on past counter-extremism behavior of British Muslims controlled for demographic factors, belonging to the UK and importance of religious identity.

	Past counter-extremism behavior
Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination – one mention (0 = no experience)	.20***
	(.04)
Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination – two mentions	.51***
	(.08)
Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination – three mentions	1.43***
	(.18)
Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination – four mentions	1.36***
	(.31)
Perceived anti-Muslim prejudice (0 = less or same)	.22***
	(.03)
Sex (0 = female)	.11***
	(.03)
Age	.00
	(.00)
Education	.06***
	(.01)
Belonging to the UK (0 = not very/at all strongly)	.09*
	(.04)
Born in the UK (0 = not born in the UK)	.07*
	(.03)
Religious identity very important (0 = quite/not very/not at all important)	-.06
	(.03)
_cons	-.07
	(.07)
N	3115
r2	.14

Note: Coefficients reported as regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2.

Direct effect of primed perceived anti-Muslim discrimination on intended counter-extremism behavior.

	Counter-extremism intentions 1	Counter-extremism intentions 2
Primed perceived anti-Muslim discrimination	-.01	-.01
	(.02)	(.02)
_cons	.48***	.59***
	(.01)	(.01)
N	917	917
R^2	.00	.00

Note: Coefficients reported as regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3.

Predicted probability of intended counter-extremism behavior controlled for demographic factors and strength of Muslim identity.

	Counter-extremism intentions 1	Counter-extremism intentions 2
Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination once (0 = never)	.03 (.03)	.02 (.02)
Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination two or three times	.06* (.02)	.07** (.02)
Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination four or more times	.02 (.02)	.00 (.02)
Perceived anti-Muslim discrimination	-.04 (.05)	.01 (.04)
Sex (0=male)	-.05** (.02)	-.04* (.02)
Age	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)
Post-secondary / vocational education (0 = no or secondary education)	.03 (.03)	.04 (.02)
Tertiary education	.03 (.02)	.04 (.02)
Born in the UK (0 = not born in the UK)	.02 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Muslim identity	.03 (.03)	.09** (.03)
_cons	.46*** (.05)	.51*** (.05)
N	917	917
r2	.03	.03

Note: Coefficients reported as regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.
+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.

Predicted probability of intended counter-extremism behavior among participants in the control condition.

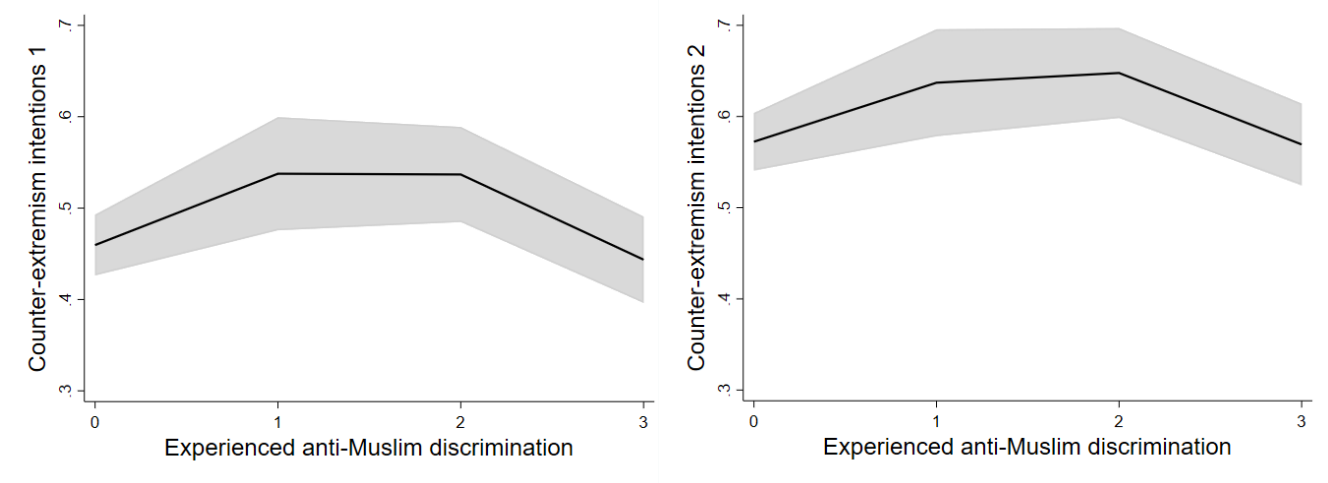
	Counter-extremism intentions 1	Counter-extremism intentions 2
Sex (0=male)	-.07**	-.06**
	(.02)	(.02)
Experienced anti-Muslim discrimination once (0 = never)	.11**	.09*
	(.04)	(.03)
Experienced anti-Muslim two or three times	.12***	.11***
	(.03)	(.03)
Experienced anti-Muslim four or more times	.03	.03
	(.03)	(.03)
Perceived anti-Muslim discrimination	-.04	-.01
	(.07)	(.06)
_cons	.49***	.59***
	(.04)	(.04)
N	462	462
r2	.05	.05

Note: Coefficients reported as regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

FIGURES

Figure 1.

Predicted values of intended counter-extremism behavior for different frequencies of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination in stage 1 (left) and stage 2 (right) of the scenario.



Note: The x-axis represents the following frequencies of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination: 0 = never, 1 = once, 2 = two or three times, 3 = four or more times. The values in the figure are based on the multiple regression displayed in Table 4.